



Perceptions of the Food Stamp Program Among Limited Household Income Residents of California: Results from Focus Groups



pineapples
asparagus
dates



watermelons
zucchini
celery



pumpkins
limes
cabbage



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May, 2002



mandarins cauliflower



walking soccer baseball



It's So Easy.

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The Food Stamp Program provides nutrition assistance to people with low income. It can help low-income consumers buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, contact the Food Stamp Program Toll Free Information Number, 1-800-221-5689.

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Executive Summary
Perceptions of the Food Stamp Program
Among Limited-Household income Residents of California:
Results from Focus Groups

In August, 2001, Juárez and Associates conducted ten focus groups for the Cancer Prevention and Nutrition Section in the California Department of Health Services and the Department of Social Services. The groups were carried out in three California cities to explore factors that impede or facilitate participation in the Food Stamp Program. Additionally, the groups were used to explore reactions to print materials and slogans about the program.

It was found that participants perceive the Food Stamp Program as filling an important need for those people who are unemployed or in a financial crisis. Although they would seek out help through the program, participants perceive themselves as needing to be in a crisis situation (loss of a source of household income) before resorting to such assistance. Many would first turn to their families for help before turning to church or governmental programs. They appear reticent to ask for help through the Food Stamp Program, in particular, because they do not believe that they qualify for the program, because they perceive it as requiring too much personal information, or because it might affect their legal status or future economic stability. Participants identified the following significant barriers to using the Food Stamp Program:

- The nature and amount of information required of applicants:
- Lack of knowledge about who qualifies for the program;
- Frustration with application process, especially given the amount and nature of documentation sought and because of the perceived demand for continuous reporting;
- A negative stigma associated with the program and demonstrated through poor service in grocery stores; rude treatment by program staff; and a tendency to perceive those on Food Stamps as lazy;
- (Spanish-dominant Latinos) Fear of losing future earnings due to having to pay back the equivalent of the assistance they received through the program (either from their children's future earnings or profits from having sold a home); and
- (Spanish-dominant Latinos) Fear that applying for the program will affect their application for legal residency.

Lack of knowledge about the program appears to be the most significant barrier. This is especially the case with regard to knowledge about how to qualify for the program, although it appears to be the most basic concern of the participants in all groups. Participants believe that the criteria for qualification should be having lost a source of support; they also believe that the proof for qualifying should simply be the notification from an employer about a job loss or a copy of an overdue bill. Finally, although there was consensus that the person in-need should have a time limit on the program, their sense was that the time limit should be individualized to allow time to achieve some stability in the household financial situation.

Among actions that would facilitate their applying for the program were such things as informing the target audience about the criteria for qualifying; assisting people with the application; and assuring that assistance is received as soon as it is needed. They see some of the other barriers possibly resolved through the use of an electronic bank transfer card.

The Food Stamp Program: Women participants tended to have more knowledge about the food stamp program than did the men. Most participants had acquired whatever little knowledge they had about the program from friends or from news items. For the most part, the target group has not seen any advertising about the food stamp program.

Participants want messages about how to qualify for the program, and they want these messages delivered via traditional and non-traditional channels. Messages with an appeal to supporting the family appear to resonate among a greater number of these participants. Though no one slogan was preferred by everyone across all groups, '*A small reason to find out if you qualify for Food Stamps: your child*' (USDA, 2000) was well received by most participants in the three focus groups where it was tested.

The pamphlet, *The Food Stamp Program* (USDA, 2000), was well received. Participants were pleased that it addressed nearly all their major concerns. They suggested adding information about what they need to bring with them when they apply for the program.

Participants suggested that the pamphlets and flyers be distributed in a variety of settings including schools, WIC clinics, medical facilities including doctor's offices, post offices, libraries, supermarkets and community centers.

- √ To promote applications, Food Stamp Program staff may want to consider the design and implementation of an educational campaign that informs the target audience about the program. Important to the campaign is a clarification of erroneous notions regarding loss of future earnings and clarification of the categories for the household income criteria. The existing Food Stamp Program pamphlet is perceived as responding to all the concerns and questions that participants appeared to have about the program. The one item that designers need to add to the pamphlet (and other materials) is either listing the documents that applicants need to bring with them or suggesting that they call to find out what documentation they need to bring in when they apply to the program.
- √ However, informing the potential target audience is not the only action that needs to be taken. Training of program staff in customer services may need to take place to assure changing the perception that personnel are significant barriers to its use. Finally, use of expanding hours, adding locations, and nutrition inducements, such as bonus value stamps for nutritious foods like fruits and vegetables, may help in changing the target group's perception that the application process is frustrating and disheartening and the benefits may not be worth the effort.

**Perceptions of the Food Stamp Program
Among Limited-Household income Residents of California:
Results from Focus Groups**

I. Introduction

A. Purpose

Juárez and Associates carried out ten focus groups during August, 2001 to explore perceptions of the food stamp program among residents of California. The project was a collaborative effort between the Cancer Prevention and Nutrition Section of the Department of Health Services and the California Department of Social Services. Six of the groups were with English-preferring women in Los Angeles, Fresno and San Diego. Two of the groups were with limited-English speaking women and an additional two were with limited-English speaking men. One of each of the groups with Spanish-dominant participants for both genders was carried out in Los Angeles and in Fresno. This topline report highlights the major findings related to the study and draws implications based on those findings. The purpose of the research was as follows:

- To identify factors that facilitate and impede use of Food Stamps;
- To explore dissemination channels for information on applying for Food Stamps; and
- To test acceptance of print materials for the food stamp program.

The groups explored knowledge of the food stamp program, barriers to its use, factors that facilitate applying for food stamp assistance, decision-making related to health and food purchases and reactions to print materials and slogans for the food stamp program. Additionally, as a strategy for identifying barriers to use of the food stamp program, participants were asked to design a new food assistance program. This report organizes findings by these themes. Appendix A provides a copy of the moderator's guides; Appendix B includes a copy of the screener used to recruit participants, while Appendix C has copies of the print materials tested.

It is important to note that results of focus groups are intended to provide readers with an impression of issues relevant to the target group. The method provides a means to gain insights into overall attitudes and trends. However, due to the small number of participants in the groups and the self-selection process for participation, the sample cannot be considered statistically representative of the target segment. Findings should not be viewed as applicable to the entire segments under study. Additionally, when findings are presented in this report, the general finding refers to a consensus in the group. Some findings which represented an interesting and divergent point of view from that of the majority of participants are singled out as the view of one person.

B. Process

The research was initiated in Los Angeles with two groups of limited-household income, English-speaking women. After these initial groups the moderator's guide was modified and sections added to probe favorite foods and food shopping habits. An additional sub-section calling for participants to design a new food assistance program was added to contribute to the ice-breaking process while permit use of an alternative strategy for exploring barriers to use of the food stamp program. A strategic decision was made by the research team (DHS staff and Juárez personnel) to use this modified guide for all remaining groups given the way it permitted information to flow during the groups. After the San Diego series of groups (all limited-household income women's groups), another task was added which consisted of having participants react to print material as well as a test of potential slogans for a Food Stamp Program awareness campaign. These probes were added to the guide and used for the three groups in Fresno.

C. Sample and Recruitment

Ten focus groups were carried out to explore factors that facilitate and impede use of the food stamp program among limited household income residents of the State of California. Four groups were carried out in Los Angeles, three in San Diego and three in Fresno. Table 1 below presents a summary of other selected characteristics of the participants. Participants were recruited from grocery stores, laundromats, community centers, bus benches, and churches. Some were found through a facility's database. Screening criteria included the following:

- Ethnicity: Anglo, African American and Hispanics;
- Age: 18 to 45 years of age;
- Not presently using Food Stamps (except for the 2 groups of former-food stamp users);
- Presence of children in the home; and
- Income: Less than \$20,000 in annual family income.

The following section of the report describes the type of participants in each of the groups.

Summary Table of Selected Participant Characteristics: Food Stamp Focus Group in August, 2001

ITEM		FOCUS GROUP SITE										Totals	
		LOS ANGELES					SAN DIEGO					FRESNO	
Focus Group Number		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	N/A	
Ethnic Group	Anglo	2	3	0	0	0	4	4	1	2	0	16	
	African Am	3	4	0	0	0	2	5	3	0	0	17	
	Latino	4	2	10	10	6	1	1	3	7	5	49	
	Married Union	4	5	10	10	2	3	3	3	3	4	47	
	Single/Divorced	6	4	0	0	4	5	6	4	4	1	34	
Mean number of Children		2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	N/A	
Years in the U.S.	1 to 3 yrs.	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	
	4 to 6 yrs.	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	4	
	7 to 9 yrs.	0	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	6	
	10 to 15 yrs.	0	1	3	3	1	1	3	0	0	2	14	
	More than 15	5	3	4	5	0	2	3	2	4	3	31	
	Born in CA	5	5	0	0	0	4	3	4	3	0	24	
Education	Grammar	0	0	5	2	1	0	0	1	0	2	11	
	High School	4	2	4	7	0	4	6	5	6	0	40	
	Some College	5	7	1	1	4	2	3	1	1	1	25	
	College Grad	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	
Used Food Stamps		10	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	1	1	18	
		0	9	10	10	6	8	9	1	6	4	63	
Used WIC		4	0	6	4	2	3	2	3	1	0	25	
Used Free/Reduced Lunch		4	2	9	6	2	4	4	4	4	2	41	
Head Start		0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	1	0	5	
Total Number of Participants		10	10*	10	10	6	8	10	7	9*	5	85	

*Missing screeners for some participants in Groups 2 and 9

1. Los Angeles

Group 1 was composed of ten limited-household income English-dominant women. Three were African American women, two were Anglo, one was of mixed ethnicity and four were Latina women. Household income ranged between a low of \$10,000.00 and a high of \$18,000.00. Four were married, and the remainder were either single or divorced parents. The number of children in the family ranged from one to three within age ranges from six months to 22 years of age. Women's ages ranged from 21 to 45.

Group 2 was composed of 10 English-dominant women. Three were African American women, two were whites and five were Hispanic. Most of the Hispanic women were married while both the white and African American women were single parents. Household incomes ranged from \$15,000.00 to \$20,000.00 in this group. The number of children in the household ranged from one to three in the age ranges of six months to 29. Women's ages ranged from 21 to 43.

Group 3 was composed of ten Spanish-dominant women. Most were of Mexican descent while three were Central American. Household income ranged from \$10,000 to \$20,000. The number of children in the household ranged from one to five. All the women were married or living with a partner. Women's ages ranged from 24 to 44.

Group 4 was composed of ten Spanish-dominant men. All were married with from two to five children. Two were of Salvadoran descent while the remainder were of Mexican descent. Household incomes ranged from \$9,000.00 to \$17,000.00. Their ages ranged from 27 to 48.

2. San Diego

Group 5 included six Spanish-dominant Hispanic women between the ages of 25 and 39. Two were married while the remainder were either divorced or separated. Household income ranged from \$10,000 to \$20,000. The number of children in the family ranged from two to five.

Group 6 had eight English-dominant women between the ages of 18 and 50. Two were African American, four were Caucasian, one was Hispanic and one was Asian. Three were married while the others were divorced or separated. The number of children in the household ranged from one to six. Household incomes ranged from \$10,000 to \$20,000.00.

Group 7 included five African American women, four Caucasians and one Hispanic English-dominant women. Ages ranged between 22 and 45. Most were single parents with between one and five children. Household incomes ranged from \$10,000 to \$15,000.00. Most were either born in the U.S. or had been here for more than 15 years.

3. Fresno

Group 8 included seven English-dominant women. Among them were three Hispanics, three African Americans and one Caucasian. Three were married; all had children between the ages of 1 ½ and 22 years of age. Women's ages ranged between 20 and 49 with most having had some high school education. Household incomes ranged between \$10,000 and \$20,000.

Group 9 was composed of nine English-dominant women. Two were Caucasians while the remainder were Hispanics. The women were between 18 and 45 years of age. All had between three and five children; their ages were between four and 21. Household incomes ranged between \$10,000 and \$20,000.

Group 10 included five Spanish-dominant males most with only a grammar school education. The men were in their 40s except for one who's age was in the mid-30's. Most were packing house workers except for one salesperson. Four were married while one was recently separated. All had between three and six children and their ages ranged between one and 23 years of age. Household income ranged between \$10,000 and \$20,000.00.

II. Findings

A. Food Consumption & Purchasing Patterns

The participants in the two Spanish-dominant groups in Los Angeles as well as all participants in the San Diego and Fresno groups were asked about their favorite foods, about where they shop and why they shop in those places. Among the more commonly mentioned favorite foods were meats, dairy products, grilled beef (*carne asada*); *enchiladas*, spaghetti, and cereals. The Spanish-dominant women in Los Angeles and the women in San Diego spontaneously mentioned vegetables as one of their favorite foods.

When asked who tends to be the shopper, women and men in Fresno noted that the woman is the one who generally goes to the supermarket. Los Angeles men and the Spanish-dominant women in San Diego stated that the men and children accompany the woman when she goes shopping for groceries. Women mentioned that they also buy the foods that their husbands or children prefer.

Among places they mentioned where they shop for food were Albertson's, Von's, Ralph's, and Food 4 Less. Supermarkets that they mentioned and which were specific to areas included Stomp's in San Diego and Save-Mart, Food Max in Fresno and Vallarta and La Superior in Los Angeles. Participants mentioned that the main reasons for shopping in those supermarkets were their proximity to the store as well as the perception that the products are cheaper at these stores. As one Fresno male noted, "Food 4 Less is there; it's very close. And the food is very inexpensive. [*Allí está el Food 4 Less; está cerquita. Y la comida la dan muy barata*]." Women in Los Angeles mentioned that they liked shopping in the bigger supermarkets as they had a larger variety of foods especially fresh fruits and vegetables.

B. Tight Times Situation

Participants in San Diego and Fresno were also asked whether there are times during the month or year when their economic situation is tough and less money is available for food purchases. Participants in all groups mentioned that they did undergo tougher economic times. For some, the tougher times were at the beginning of the month while for others, it was toward the end of the month. Fresno men were particular hard hit during the time that the focus groups were held there; three of the men had been recently laid-off from a fruit packinghouse in the area.

When queried as to what they did with regard to food purchases during those times, participants reported a number of strategies in which they engage. Among the more commonly mentioned strategies were the following:

Exhibit 1. Strategies for Dealing with Tight Economic Situations and Food Purchases

Women	Men
Purchase canned goods and instant soups	Eat less
Purchase only to meet immediate needs or "...buy the basics" (Fresno woman)	Buy less
Cut back on meat purchases	Buy less meats
Buy canned goods	Buy what the children need
Eating budget foods, like rice and beans, Top Ramen, and ground meat	Use coupons
	Shop at different stores for the specials
	Eating budget foods, e.g, rice and beans, Top Ramen, ground meat

Among the Latina women's group in San Diego, participants mentioned the notion of limiting the amount of food their children ate including, "telling the kids to have to eat less, limit the milk, or [eating] half an apple."

Participants were then read a scenario depicting the situation of either Diane or Jaime (appropriate for the gender of the group) who had been laid off and was now in tough economic times. The participants were asked if this person should ask for help, where s/he should go for help and why such a person might avoid assistance through governmental programs.

Participants were asked what word they would use to describe the situation of the person; in response, they mentioned that Diane/Jaime would feel "*Frustrated*", "*Worried*", "*Stressed*", "*Scared*", "*Desperate*", and "*Depressed*". The consensus in both women and men's groups was that the person should ask for help *for the sake of the children*. Many identified with the posed situation noting that they had lived through such a period. The Los Angeles men, however, were a bit more reticent in having Jaime seek help stating that he should seek help "...if he really needs it [si deberas lo necesita]". One noted that Jaime "...needs to find a way to get ahead [...necesita encontrar la manera de salir adelante.]" Fresno men were more deliberating noting that Jaime should get help for the sake of the family.

For the most part, all participants noted that the person should seek help now. Among the sources of help they mentioned were WIC, family, church programs, community programs, the unemployment program or other governmental programs. One Los Angeles woman stated that Diane should not approach the food stamp program, as "...the government will charge it to the children [...el gobierno se lo va a cobrar a los niños]." Others mentioned that she should not go because it would affect her legal status or because it would affect the ability to purchase a house in the future.

When asked what they would do in Diane/Jaime's situation, participants mentioned that they have been in such situations. They noted that they would go ask for help from their family, from the church and finally, ask for public assistance. One San Diego woman noted that her final resort would be to apply for Food Stamps primarily to secure food for the children.

Additionally, participants were asked why Diane/Jaime might not apply for governmental assistance. Among the impediments they most frequently mentioned in all groups were the following:

- Lack of information about the programs; and
- Lack of documentation of immigrant status (especially among the Spanish-dominant groups).

Other impediments to seeking help mentioned less frequently were that the person:

- Is still looking for a job;
- Has savings;
- Has pride;
- Is lazy; or
- Is reluctant due to the racism she/he feels is displayed in the negative attitude of the staff in government programs.

The Fresno women's groups noted that there might be too many restrictions on government programs; that these take too much time; and that "*They ask a lot of questions and ... get too private.*" This seemed to be the prevailing attitude, especially among African American women participants across all sites.

C. New Design for Food Program

Prior to discussing the food stamp program, participants in the latter 8 groups were asked to design a new community food assistance program. They were also asked about how to determine whether a person really needed the help; what criteria to use for determining whether someone needed help; how long to provide assistance; who should be assisted through the program and how to inform people about such a program.

In response to who should be eligible for the 'new' food assistance program, participants mentioned that "*...those who really need it*" should be eligible for the program. Very few participants in the groups perceived themselves as needing such help. For the most part, they noted that they or their spouses/partners had regular household incomes from jobs.

Fresno men were especially concerned about assuring that farm laborers qualified for the programs regardless of immigration status. One San Diego woman noted that "*...people like us and our children should qualify for this program*". Also, participants were adamant that the assistance should be immediate and for anywhere from six to 12 months. Others, however, stated that the help should be there until the person is back on her/his feet or that the timeline should be more sensitive to an individual's circumstances as some jobs did not pay sufficient amounts to cover food and bills. Participants mentioned two scenarios to justify the need for extending the time limits for benefits. The first situation given was that when one is unemployed, the household falls behind on bills. Thus, if one gets Food Stamps only as long as s/he is unemployed, it will take longer to 'catch up' with bills, if they ever do. Another scenario frequently used to justify the need for an extended timeframe was the notion that some jobs just do not provide a living wage.

As a consequence, once the family allocated their money for rent, most of the household income was spent.

Participants mentioned that there should be some way to qualify people for the program. Among the more commonly mentioned strategies for qualifying people were the following:

- Having the person bring a letter from their employer to demonstrate that they had been laid off;
- Bringing in an overdue bill; or
- Having people “pre-apply” over the phone.

Participants identified a number of ways of informing people about the program. They mentioned that flyers about the program could be provided through the schools; at supermarkets; at churches; in parks; in libraries; recreation centers; shopping malls; mailers with the gas bills; WIC offices; at post offices; doctor’s offices; and in clinics. Other strategies suggested were broadcast advertisements and brochures.

Participants mentioned that the food assistance program should be sponsored by either churches or community organizations. Some participants in Los Angeles and San Diego saw the government as a natural sponsor for this type of program. Fresno women in particular were very skeptical about government funding for such a program. One noted, *“You can’t go to the government anymore.”* Another noted, *“The government will tell you to go to Catholic Charities”*.

D. Family Rules Regarding Health & Nutrition

Participants were asked who is the principal decision-maker regarding doctor’s visits, food shopping, and applying for a food assistance program. Except for the men’s group in Los Angeles, most participants stated that the woman is the principal decision-maker with regard to the first two activities. As a Los Angeles Latino participant stated regarding who is the decision-maker, *“...the moms, in the greater occasions, because they know what is happening with the kids [...las mamás, en ocasiones más grandes, porque saben lo que está pasando con los niños.]* One Fresno woman reinforced that opinion stating, *“He doesn’t even know the kids’ birthdays.”* The Fresno men’s group noted that women tended to have more time, experience and patience to deal with those types of matters.

More of the men in the Los Angeles group stated that the decisions regarding applying for nutrition assistance were made jointly. However, it was the woman who usually engaged in the information seeking behavior and actually going to the location to acquire, fill out and submit applications.

E. Knowledge About the Food Stamp Program

Participants in all groups were asked about the food stamp program. For the most part, the men mentioned that they did not know about the program. What knowledge they had had been obtained through news items about the program. More of the women indicated that they had heard of the program, and some stated that they had been assisted through the program. This was especially the case for the women in Group 1 in Los Angeles. Half of the women in the San

Diego groups mentioned that they knew about the program. Fewer of the women in Fresno reported knowing about the program.

When asked what was the first thing that came to mind when the Food Stamp Program was mentioned, participants wrote down such items as the following:

- Free food
- Assistance with food for those who need it
- Low-household
- Help
- Larger families
- Welfare

More African American women used pejorative terms in their top-of-mind description of the Food Stamp program. For example, a San Diego women stated that she had written “*People in your business*” and “*Too much to go through*” as her first impressions. One Fresno woman mentioned “*Hassle- as complicated as possible just to turn you down*” as her written comment on the program.

When asked for their impressions of the food stamp program, the participants mentioned such unaided comments as the following:

- People can only purchase food with the stamps;
- One gets a certain quantity depending on family size;
- It has a negative stigma (San Diego women);
- It involves constant reporting of household income and other personal information;
- Undocumented immigrants receive too much assistance through the program; and
- The application process is tedious (“*It’s a big application- you can’t leave anything out. You have to wait 2 weeks if you leave something out.*” Fresno woman)

Most of the participants across all groups mentioned that they did not know the criteria needed to qualify for the program. Also, when asked, most participants stated that they were not familiar with the program regulations. The majority of participants in each group thought that one could not own a home or a car to qualify for the program. The one regulation they were familiar with was the one requiring residency or citizenship to receive assistance. However, most were clear that even if one were not a legal resident, the person’s children, if born in the U.S., would qualify for assistance through the food stamp program. In fact, most mentioned that children generally qualify for the program. As a Los Angeles woman stated, “*Even if we couldn’t [qualify], we’d think the kids should.*” For many, though, there was a perception that undocumented immigrants were getting a large share of the food stamp services.

F. Barriers to Usage of Food Stamp Program

Participants were asked what keeps them from applying for the food stamp program. Among the most commonly mentioned reasons cited in all groups for not applying were the following:

- Lack of knowledge about the program, in general;
- Lack of knowledge of criteria to qualify for the program;
- Pride or embarrassment;
- No perceived need for the help;
- Frustrations with the application process;
- Rude treatment by program staff; and
- The “dirty looks” they get from grocery store clerks or shoppers.

As mentioned in an earlier section, participants generally did not know much about the program. When asked whether they had seen “advertisements” for the Food Stamp Program (i.e., information), most participants could not recall having seen any advertising for the program, although one woman mentioned having seen a poster at WIC and several men recalled seeing a sign at the store.

Additionally, some strongly held opinions voiced across all groups were that the application process is a frustrating one. The frustration results from several factors, according to participants. First, “...*the process is too long*”, noted a woman from Los Angeles. Several of the women pointed out that one had to wait almost all day and even a second day with no assurances that one would get Food Stamps after going through the entire process. As another stated, “*You better pack breakfast, lunch and dinner as you’re gonna’ be there all day.*”

Secondly, participants agreed that there was too much information required of them in applying for the program. One Los Angeles women in the second group stated, “*I don’t want them hounding me...I don’t want them asking me no questions.*”

Finally, people expressed frustration that bordered on contempt for the treatment received at the hands of food stamp program staff. As one Fresno participant stated, “*They cop this attitude.*” Another voiced a similar sentiment noting, “*They make it confrontational.*” A third one added, “*Sometimes they don’t believe you.*” At times, this attitude also extended to the government in general; a common comment was that they found it “...*difficult to believe that the government is encouraging you to go on welfare*”(Los Angeles). Latino men in both cities noted that racism was the underlying motive for the poor treatment by the Food Stamp Program staff. They noted that “racism” (which may be class-based) was especially the case among Latino program staff unwilling to help other Latinos who were applicants.

Spanish-dominant Latinos also had other impressions of the program that hindered their applying for assistance. Several common perceptions voiced by the groups in Los Angeles and Fresno were as follows:

- People lack appropriate identification documents;
- Children would have to pay back any assistance in the future (“*They’ll take their check once they start working.* [Les quitan el cheque ya que empiezen a trabajar]” Los Angeles woman.
- The children would be the first sent off if the United States was in a war;
- The government would take out the equivalent of the assistance received at some future time (e.g., when one went to sell one’s home);
- It would affect the process for acquiring legal residency;
- Lack of promotion of the program on broadcast and print outlets;
- Illiteracy; and
- It would affect any purchases of homes in the future.

However, in apparent mixed emotions about the program, participants saw the program as “...insurance in case something happens” (Los Angeles woman) or as “*if I need it, it’s good to have it around.*” Many did not see themselves as either qualifying for the program or as needing it. Participants stated that before they would apply for assistance through the program, they would have to lose their jobs or be in some crisis (marital breakup; incapacitated; or widowed). Many saw the food stamp program as a last resort preferring to go to their families or churches before applying to the program. In part, this may be due to the perception that waiting 30 days to get Food Stamps does not gibe with the immediate need to feed the family.

For these participants, fingerprinting of applicants was not viewed as a deterrent to applying for services per se. One Los Angeles male noted that one has to be fingerprinted anyway when applying for a driver’s license. However, as a Fresno woman suggested about the Food Stamp program application, “*It should be a basic form with income, not a inch-thick packet with fingerprint and social security number...*”

When comparing the Food Stamp Program to other assistance programs, the only similarity pointed out by a few participants was that it offered assistance. Most contrasted the program pointing out that WIC, MediCal, or church-based programs had simpler applications and did not have such stringent criteria for qualifying for them. As one noted about the church and food bank programs, “*They just want to see an ID and how many live in the house. They don’t care about anything else.*” Also, many noted that with these types of programs, assistance was immediate.

In contrasting programs, participants were especially laudable of the Women and Infant Care (WIC) program. All the women in Group 9 in San Diego had heard about positive experiences with WIC. One Los Angeles Latina stated, “*WIC is a big help.* [WIC es una gran ayuda]”. Others even perceived that the WIC program is based on donations and not affiliated with the government. Another went so far as to suggest that the food stamp program be structured “...like WIC” where clients do not have to pay back goods and services at a later date [...como WIC que mañana no se tiene que pagar].” A Los Angeles male pointed out one contrasting feature between the two programs: people can sell Food Stamps while “*You can’t sell WIC, and they ask for an I.D. card.*” A Fresno male also compared the programs and seemed to ascribe a more humanitarian orientation to WIC’s criteria for qualification: “*The WIC is to feed both (mother and fetus)* [El WIC es para alimentar a los dos].” Several in this group stated that as soon as the woman confirms her pregnant state, she begins to receive assistance unlike the food stamp program where there is a long wait before getting aid.

G. Facilitates Food Stamp Use

Participants were also asked what would facilitate their applying for assistance through the food stamp program. They were asked what would have to change in the program to motivate them to apply. Among the more frequently mentioned unaided suggestions were the following:

- Change the requirements so that anyone in need can qualify for the program;
- Giving out information about where to apply and about who qualifies;
- Assist people in filling out the application; and
- Assure assistance is received on the day the person applies.

Other less frequently mentioned but important comments suggested by participants as ways to improve application for the Food Stamp Program included providing personnel or training participants to assist with filling out the application; having program staff include dependent costs for insurance into the household costs in qualifying people; expanding the income criteria to include more working people; making information available through the WIC clinics; and using participation in other safety-net programs as a qualifier for the program. A Fresno woman suggested that perhaps if a person qualified for the low-income programs for the utility services then the person should also qualify for the Food Stamps Program. Women in San Diego and Fresno mentioned the idea of a Food Stamp phone number to call for information and even permit pre-screening over the phone. Fresno women also mentioned that the toll-free number should have a simplified menu with information on the program.

When probed for specific changes in the program, participants reacted ***overwhelmingly positive to the idea of an electronic benefits transfer card***. They noted that this would help in cutting down on fraud as well as diminish the likelihood of getting poor service by grocery store clerks or nasty looks by store customers. As one Los Angeles woman stated, *“That’s good! It saves you from the humiliation at the store.”* Others suggested training for clerks or having one line for food stamp users as a way of dealing with the rude treatment in stores. One concern expressed by a participant in Los Angeles was whether small grocery stores would be willing to take the card.

Other probes regarding changes to the Food Stamp Program that elicited positive reactions were a change in the number and location of the offices. According to participants, this would result in less time spent waiting at the offices. Extended hours also elicited positive reactions with participants mentioning that office hours should be from 8 A.M. to 6 P.M. Finally, participants mentioned that the offices should be located in more convenient places such as malls or in WIC clinics.

Inducements

Several nutrition-related inducements that could enable people to buy more healthy foods were described. Participants were asked which might motivate them to apply to the Food Stamp Program, assuming that they qualified for assistance. Participants mentioned that they found the following concepts motivating in terms of serving as inducements to counter the perceived barriers of loss of time waiting in the Food Stamp Program offices, the poor treatment by staff and the social cost of using Food Stamps:

Exhibit 2. Reactions to Specific Inducements

Idea	Typical Reaction as to Whether they found it Motivating
Larger quantity of a food item if purchased with Food Stamps	<i>“Definitely”</i> (Fresno). <i>“But no junk food.”</i> (Fresno)
More fruits and vegetables if purchased with Food Stamps	Positive reaction. <i>“It’s good food for the whole family. [Es buen alimento para toda la familia.]”</i> (Fresno male)
Minimum amount of Food Stamps if participant qualifies for assistance	Participants liked the idea of receiving between \$50.00 and \$75.00 in Food Stamps, as that would make it worthwhile to go through the application process. Fresno men suggested an amount between \$100 to \$150 per month per person.

Participants were asked about the notion of being able to acquire additional items of food by using Food Stamps. When asked for the types of foods they would want to see as part of the ‘bonus value’ items, participants mentioned cereal, milk, eggs, potatoes, and cheese. A typical reaction was that if they bought one item with foods stamps, they would like to get another “free”. Fruits and vegetables were also mentioned as motivating especially if they got the produce at half price.

Although someone in every group reacted with surprise at the use of nutrition-related inducements, it is important to note that more of the men usually reacted negatively to the idea. Their perception was that the food stamp program was a help in and of itself.

No participants were favorable to the idea of using Food Stamps at restaurants. Among the reasons mentioned for opposing the idea were that 1) people with Food Stamps did not need to eat at restaurants; and 2) the price of one restaurant meal would be the equivalent of a week’s worth of meals prepared at home.

H. Messages

Participants in all groups were asked what they need to know about the Food Stamp Program to motivate them to apply. The most commonly mentioned information items were as follows:

- The qualification or criteria for receiving assistance;
- What one can buy with Food Stamps;
- How long one can be on the program; and
- Where to go to apply for the program.

Fresno women mentioned that they would like to get messages that would let them know that they would get assistance on the day they applied.

When probed about a message that mentioned how the Food Stamp Program would help provide children with nutritious meals, participants mentioned that they would find that to be a motivating message. Only one male in the Fresno group objected to the message noting that he and his wife were ones who knew what was good for their children.

When asked how they would get the information about the program out to people like them, participants suggested the following range of strategies:

- Television advertisements in English and Spanish broadcast during news programs; and during sports programs to reach the men;
- Radio
- Flyers
- Brochures
- Bus stops
- Sending print materials home from school with the children
- Hospitals, clinics, and doctor's offices;
- Billboards; and
- Distributing flyers at churches, community centers, post offices, and WIC programs.

One Los Angeles participant, suggesting another information dissemination strategy stated, *“When I applied for MediCal, they told me to apply for (food) stamps. [Cuando aplicqué para MediCal, me dijeron que aplicara para las estampillas].”*

I. Creative Materials

Participants were asked to create a slogan that would motivate people like them to apply for Food Stamps. Los Angeles participants suggested more potential slogans than did participants in other sites. Exhibit 3 lists the slogans created in the groups.

Exhibit 3. Slogans Created by Participants

Los Angeles	San Diego	Fresno
Show me the Food Stamps.	Need to have something catchy with the words	When you need help getting back on your feet- There is someone to turn to.
Take another look at Food Stamps: Information-Application-Food	Need, Children and Healthy.	
New & improved process.		
Food Stamps- Let them work for you.		
Let us work for you.		
Help us to help you.		
Food Stamps- Providing for your children and your needs.		
Miracles happen.		
It's there if you need 'em		

Fresno participants were provided with one pamphlet and three flyers for review. Additionally, they were asked to react to the slogans printed on the flyers. See Appendix C for examples of the pamphlet and flyers.

Reactions to the pamphlet ‘Food Stamp Program’: Participants liked the content of the brochures. They described it as “*informative*”, “*encouraging*” or “*perfect* [perfecto]”.

Participants mentioned that the pamphlet answered their basic questions about the program. They were especially pleased with the information regarding the household income criteria. In all groups, participants were heard to state spontaneously after reading the pamphlet that they might qualify for the program. As one man in the group stated as he read the pamphlet, “*I’m looking at the household income. Maybe I qualify.* [Estoy viendo los ingresos. Tal vez califico (He smiles.)] When asked if the document motivated them to apply for the program, those who mentioned that they might qualify stated that it was motivating. Also, they suggested adding the following item to the pamphlet: information about what a person needs to bring with them when applying for

the program. The men also suggested changing the colors to make them more attractive as well as changing the expression on the child as she looked too sad.

Reactions to the Flyer: Depending on the gender of the group, participants reviewed one of two different flyers. The women reviewed the flyer entitled *A Small Reason to Find Out if You Qualify for Food Stamps: Your Child*. The men's group reviewed the flyer with the slogan *Guess Who Qualifies for Food Stamps: You Might*. Participants in each group mentioned that they liked the flyer they reviewed. However, they did not find this material as informative nor as motivating as the previously reviewed pamphlet. As one noted, *"It doesn't tell you enough."* Participants suggested that designers add the information regarding household income criteria to these flyers.

Participants suggested distributing the pamphlet at such locations as supermarkets, post offices, churches, libraries, WIC centers, community centers, doctor's offices and through the schools. Few of the participants mentioned that they access the internet. This was especially the case among Spanish-speaking groups.

Reactions to the Slogans: Participants were asked to review three slogans. No one slogan was preferred across all three groups. The one that received the most positive response was the slogan "A small reason to find out if you qualify for Food Stamps: Your child" due to the appeal to the family. Their reactions to the slogans are as follows:

Exhibit 4. Reactions to Slogans - Fresno Only

A Small Reason to Find Out if you Qualify for Food Stamps: Your Child.	Hunger does not discriminate.	Guess Who Qualifies for Food Stamps? You might.
Preferred by the women in the 6 PM group as <i>"Your child is the first priority, not your pride."</i> They also found this one most motivating for getting them to apply to the program.	Four of the women liked this as <i>"...it's true."</i> Least liked by the 6PM women's group due to a perceived negative message.	Preferred by the 4 PM women's group as <i>"...it gets your hopes up high."</i>
The men found this slogan as the one most motivating	Men found this one as the one most likely to grab their attention.	Men suggested changing the Spanish version to read <i>"Sabes quien puede recibir cupones cupones? Tu."</i> They wanted to switch the words "Do you know" for the word "Guess".

J. Spokespersons

Participants in the various groups were asked to identify a good spokesperson to promote the food stamp program. In most groups, they mentioned a type of person rather than providing actual names. Among the types that were suggested as good spokespersons for promoting the program were people who were known in the community such as priests or ministers; single mothers who had gone through the program; or someone who has been in dire straits and has made it through.

Among those where specific names were provided, the suggestions were as follows:

Fresno: Sara Reyes (radio DJ); the Fresno mayor; and Stephanie from Channel 24 in Fresno.

San Diego: Jorge Ramos, newscaster; Humberto Lama, morning DJ (101.9);

K. Food Purchases with Extra Money

Participants were asked what types of food they might buy if they were to begin receiving an extra \$20.00 per month. For the most part, participants mentioned foods which were staples in the household or that children preferred. Among the foods most frequently mentioned were the following:

- Milk;
- Cereal;
- Potatoes; and
- Meats.

Others also mentioned, though with less frequency were

Bread	Canned goods	Fruits	Vegetables
Beans	Eggs	Pastas	Juices

Some women mentioned the idea of splurging on “healthy items” or buying items that they would consider treats for their children such as pudding or ice cream. Women in several groups mentioned the idea of buying “*filling foods*” with the extra money.

L. Other Issues

Participants were asked what they thought of the idea of changing the name of the food stamp program. Most sought to keep the name the same. Only one Los Angeles women’s group and a women’s group in Fresno thought that was a good idea to change the name of the program and suggested names such as “The Food Credit Card”, “The Food and Nutrition Service” and “Assistance in Buying”.

Finally, participants were asked what would be the appropriate amount of Food Stamps for a family of four. Appropriate amounts provided in the groups ranged from \$250.00 to \$450.00 per month. Participants did mention that an appropriate amount depended on the ages of the children as teenagers consumed much larger quantities of food than younger children. One Fresno woman stated, “...with six kids, you need \$553.00”.

III. Conclusions and Implications

Ten focus groups were held in three California cities to explore factors that impede or facilitate participation in the Food Stamp Program. Additionally, the groups were used to explore reactions to print materials and slogans about the program. This section of the topline report presents conclusions from the findings and provides some implications for campaign efforts.

General Conclusions

Participants do see a need for the Food Stamp Program. They perceive it as filling an important need for those people who are unemployed or in a financial crisis. However, they see the following significant barriers to using the food stamp program:

- The nature and amount of information required of applicants;
- Lack of knowledge about who qualifies for the program;
- A frustrating application process; and
- A negative stigma associated with the program and demonstrated through poor service in grocery stores; rude treatment by program staff; and a tendency to perceive those on Food Stamps as lazy.

Two misinformation-related barriers of particular concern for Spanish-dominant Latinos were:

- Fear of losing future earnings due to having to pay back the equivalent of the assistance they received through the program (either from their children's future earnings or profits from having sold a home); and
- Fear that applying for the program will affect their application for legal residency;

Participants would seek out help through the program, but they perceive themselves as needing to be in a crisis (loss of a source of household income) before needing to resort to such assistance. They see some of the barriers possibly resolved through the use of an electronic benefits transfer card (EBT).

For the most part, the target group has not seen any advertising about the food stamp program. To promote applications, Food Stamp Program staff may want to consider the design and implementation of an educational campaign that informs the target audience about the program. Important to the campaign is a clarification of erroneous notions regarding loss of future earnings and expansion of the categories for the household income criteria. Given the high immigrant population in California, another option to consider is the notion of developing a program designed specifically for the State of California and that makes allowances for the high limited-income immigrant population regardless of legal status.

The existing Food Stamp Program pamphlet tested in the Fresno groups was perceived as responding to all the concerns and questions that participants appeared to have about the program. The one item that designers need to add to the pamphlet (and other materials) is either listing the documents that applicants need to bring with them or suggesting that they call to find out what they need to bring in when they apply to the program.

However, informing the potential target audience is not the only action that needs to be taken. Training of program staff in customer services may need to take place to reduce the perception that personnel are significant barriers to its use.

Finally, inducements to facilitate purchasing healthy foods, expanding hours or adding locations may help in changing the target group's perceptions that the application process is frustrating and disheartening. The ideas expressed by this group of participants that use of "junk foods" should be discouraged and lower-cost fruits and vegetables would serve as encouragements in countering barriers to experiencing the Food Stamp Program may suggest that nutrition education should accompany food stamp benefits to encourage people to focus more on healthy items.

Specific Conclusions

Food Purchasing and Favorite Foods: Participants were found to shop at the major grocery stores because of the proximity of the stores to their homes. Another major reason for shopping at those stores is because they are perceived as offering cheaper prices. Finally, they prefer these stores because they have a larger variety of goods. Shopping appears to be primarily a woman's task, although more of the men in Los Angeles perceive themselves as participating in this activity. This suggests that grocery stores may be a good venue for distributing information about nutrition to the target audiences.

Favorite foods did not vary much in the groups, as they appear to like many of the basic dishes such as meats, dairy products, pastas, potatoes, cereals, and vegetables. Some of the purchasing choices appear to be driven by their partners' and children's likes.

Tight Economic Times: Participants in all groups recognized that they undergo tight economic situations during the month or the year. They all appear to have formulated strategies for such times including varying their purchasing patterns by buying cheaper food, reducing the purchases of meats or buying only the basics. They identified with the scenario discussed in the groups about the laid-off parent. They all recognized Diane or Jaime's plight and strongly believed that help should be sought out quickly for the sake of the children in the family. Many would first turn to their families for assistance before going to the church or governmental programs. They appear reticent to ask for help through the Food Stamp program, in particular, because they do not believe that they qualify for the program, because they perceive it as requiring too much information, or because it might affect their legal status or future economic stability.

New Food Assistance Program Design: Participants do see a need to have a food assistance program available for 'those who need it'. They do not perceive themselves as 'in need' given that either they or their partners are employed.

They also hold that the food assistance program should be there to help anyone who qualifies. They believe that the criteria for qualification should be having lost a source of support; they also believe that the proof for qualifying should simply be the notification from an employer about a job loss or a copy of an overdue bill. Also, although there was consensus that the person should

have a time limit on the program, their sense was that the time limit should be individualized to allow time to attain stability in their economic situation.

Rules About Health and Nutrition: Mothers are the ones that make decisions about taking children to the doctors and about what foods are purchased and prepared. Although, decisions regarding whether the family will apply for assistance through a program may be a shared or deliberated one, the mother/woman is generally the information-seeker as well as the one who will go and apply. Principally, the mother is perceived as having the patience, the experience, the needed information, and the time for dealing with the application process.

The Food Stamp Program: Women participants tended to have more knowledge about the food stamp program than did the men. Most participants had acquired whatever little knowledge about the program from friends or from news items. Most participants, even African American women who were more pejorative about the program, viewed it positively and characterized it as a ‘help’. Most were ignorant of the criteria for qualifying for the program although they did have some mistaken notions about who could qualify.

Lack of knowledge about the program appears to be the most significant barrier. This is especially the case with regard to knowledge about how to qualify for the program, although it appears to be the most basic concern of the participants in all groups. Other barriers include lack of a perceived need for the program, frustrations with the application process (including the amount, nature and constant reporting requirements), and the rude treatment at the hands of program staff. Additional concerns among the Spanish-dominant participants were misconceptions that participation in the program would affect their applications for residency or their or their children’s future earnings.

Among actions that would facilitate their applying for the program were such things as informing the target audience about the criteria for qualifying, assisting people with the application, and assuring that assistance is received as soon as it is needed. This suggests that information about assistance through the program should be routinely received when a person experiences being laid off of work.

Participants saw the use of an electronic benefits transfer card as a positive action. They believe it will address issues of fraudulent use of Food Stamps and diminish the likelihood of being the object of humiliating treatment in grocery stores. Participants did not favor extending use of Food Stamps to restaurant settings, as they viewed use of the benefits in this manner as inefficient.

Participants reacted positively to the use of inducements to counter loss of time and perceived poor treatment by program staff when applying for assistance through the Food Stamp Program. Among the inducements favored were obtaining a larger minimum quantity of Food Stamps or of some food items and obtaining more produce with the use of Food Stamps. There were some in each group who mentioned that they did not see a need for inducements, as getting Food Stamps was sufficient help, in and of itself.

Messages and Creative Materials: Participants appear to want messages about how to qualify for the program, and they want these messages delivered via traditional and non-traditional channels. Messages with an appeal to supporting the family appear to resonate among a greater

number of these participants. Though no one slogan was preferred by everyone across all groups, '*A Small Reason to Find Out if You Qualify for Food Stamps: Your Child*' was well received by most participants where it was tested.

The pamphlet was well received. Participants were pleased that it addressed all their major concerns. They suggested adding information about what they need to bring with them when they apply for the program.

The flyers were viewed as adequate in terms of content. Participants preferred the pamphlets over the flyers, given the more extensive information in the former, especially with regard to information about household income criteria.

Participants suggested that the pamphlets and flyers be distributed in a variety of settings including schools, post offices, libraries, supermarkets, hospitals, WIC clinics, doctor's offices, and community centers.

Appendix A:
Food Stamp Moderator's Guides

Moderator's Guide
Food Stamp Usage – Draft 4
August 15, 2001

I. Introductions and Ground-rules (5-10 Minutes)

1. Moderator introduces her/himself and explains project's purpose.

Hello, my name is _____ and I work for a research company in Los Angeles. We are very interested in the use of Food Stamps and what keeps some people from using them. We are also interested in hearing your thoughts and opinions about what we can tell the people who run the food stamp program to make it easier for people to use Food Stamps.

Before we start talking, let me tell you a little about this focus group and answer any initial questions you may have.

2. Explain focus group process.

A focus group is a research method for collecting data similar to surveys, except that rather than asking questions on a one-on-one basis, the whole group is asked and everyone can respond.

3. Explain ground-rules.

- We will be tape-recording your comments today. This is for me to review and summarize your thoughts in a report. It would be too hard to try to talk and take notes, so I use a tape recorder. Also, I want to let you know that there are colleagues of mine on the other side of the mirror listening to your commentary.
- As explained in the consent form, this focus group is confidential. Everything you say in this discussion will be kept private. No names will be used in my report. It is important to us that you give us your honest opinions.
- To make sure we end the group on time and cover everything we need to, I will be controlling how much time we spend talking about some of the issues this evening. I will move the discussion from topic to topic, and allow everyone an opportunity to speak.
- You do not need to raise your hands, but please speak loudly, clearly, and one at a time without interrupting others. If you speak at the same time I won't be able to understand what you said when I listen to the tapes later. Also, the tapes can't see you nodding or shaking your head. So, please speak up and share your opinions
- There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your opinions and you do not have to agree with one another. We are actually interested in hearing different opinions.

4. Respondent introductions:

Please tell me your first name, and something about yourself-if you're married & have kids, their ages, what part of town you live in; how long you've lived there; and what type of work you do. And, Yes, homemakers do work hard at home.

Food Consumption & Purchasing Patterns

- Let's talk a little bit first about some of your favorite food. What do you like to buy at the grocery store? What are some of your favorite foods to buy?
- Where do you usually shop for food? What are some of the stores you go to? Why go there?
- Who usually shops for groceries?

Tight Times Situation

- Are there ever times during the month or the year when money is tight? What do you do about food during those times?
- Let me give you a situation. This is **Diane's/Jimmy's** situation. (Diane/Jimmy) was working as a (childcare worker/delivery man) [Choose appropriate job.] but got laid off about 3 months ago. S/He's gone through the little money that s/he'd put away for rough times. S/He's barely made the rent/house payment this month. S/He's already missed one payment on the car. S/He's in a bind, now. The kids are starting school. The family is running low on food.
 - How do you think ____ feels? What is one word you would describe how s/he feels?
 - Should ____ ask for help? When should s/he ask for help?
 - Where should s/he go first for help? Why there? Where should s/he go next? Why there? How about after that?
 - Do you think that ____ will ever ask for help? What makes you say that?
 - What might be some reasons why ____ would not go to the governmental programs to get help? What might s/he be afraid of?
 - What would you do in this situation?

New Design for Food Program

- Let's say that there is a new program in the community that will help out people like ____ by providing food. Help me design this new program.
 - Who should be able to get help?
 - Where should they be able to get help?
 - How do we know that they really need the helping hand?
 - For how long should they be able to get help?
 - How soon should they get the help?
 - Where should they be able to get the food?
 - What about applying for the program? What should that look like?
 - What about the actual services? Who should be there working in the program? What hours? Where should the program be located?
 - How could we tell people about this new program?
 - What type of organization would sponsor this program- Government? Church? Community group?

Knowledge About the Food Stamp Program

- I'm going to switch topics on you. Let me ask about the Food Stamp Program. You have a pad in front of you. Before you say anything, write down the first thing that comes to mind when I say "Food Stamp Program". Now, write down the first thing that comes to mind when I say "Food Stamps". **After giving them a minute, discuss what they wrote.**
- How many of you know about the food stamp program?
- How does it work? What do you have to do to get Food Stamps?
- Are there rules for being able to get Food Stamps? What do you think these are?
 - Are these rules different from other assistance programs and can you qualify for one and not the other?
 - Can you receive Food Stamps if you work? Own a house? Own a car?
 - What about citizenship? Are the rules the same for citizens and legal immigrants? Can you get Food Stamps if you're a legal immigrant? Can your kids be eligible, even if you're not?
- How/Where did you find out about these rules?
- **[FOR NEVER USERS or DROP OUTS ONLY:]** Have any of you ever applied for Food Stamps? What happened? PROBE: How long did it take you to get approved? How did you feel about that? What could be done to change that?

Family Rules Regarding Health & Nutrition

- Who in the family is responsible for making decisions about health issues? Let's say that you need to see a doctor. Who makes the decision for you to go? Who decides where you go?
- What about decisions regarding food and where to shop and what to buy? Who decides that?
- What about applying for a program? Let's say that there is a new program in the community that would give your kids a free lunch. Who decides whether you apply for the program or not?
- Who would go out and get that information to begin with? How would you know about it?
- Now, let's say the family does not have enough money to buy food. Who decides that the family will apply for Food Stamps? Who goes out and gets information about the program? Who would you go to first to find out about the food stamp program? Who in the family would go out and actually do all the work of getting the paperwork and filling it out?
- If you are not the decision-maker: Do you agree with the decision-maker in your household? What can you do to influence that decision?
- Tell me this, what has to happen before you even consider applying for Food Stamps? What would you do or where would you go before you say, "O.K., I'll go get into the food stamp program"?

Barriers to Usage of Food Stamp Program

- Does anyone here think that they might qualify for the program? (**PROBE: In case you don't receive a good response from this question, ask the following: "Do you know someone who may qualify but is not already receiving Food Stamps?"**)
- What keeps you, your family, or your friends from applying for the program? **PROBE: Fingerprinting needed for application; Too much value in assets (i.e., own a car); Services provided by Food Stamp program staff; Loss of Immigrant status; Experiences of others; Negative stigma associated with food stamp use; Don't know they are eligible; Don't believe they need it; Benefit too small; Application is too complicated; Time and cost of applying is too high (due to transportation, work lost, childcare, etc.) ; Discouragement from others. Which of these barriers play the largest roles? Can you rank these in order of importance?**
- Does anyone use any other programs to help themselves and their families - like WIC, a food bank, or some church-based or other community-based program? How do you think this might be different from using food stamps? How might it be similar? **PROBE: Access, staff qualities, treatment from program staff, hours of operation, convenience, others' attitudes toward the recipient, Other?**
- What about getting help from your family? Is this similar or different from using food stamps?
- What kind of people use food stamps?
- Is getting food stamps the "Last Resort"? If so, why?

Facilitates Food Stamp Use

- What would have to happen in the program before you would consider applying for food stamps? Does anything need to change?
- Is there anything about the application process that needs to change? How much help do you need for going through the application process?
- Is there anything about where you apply that needs to change?
- Is there anything about the staffing of the program that needs to change?
- Is there anything about the location of the offices?
- What about the hours of operation?
- Let's say the program started an electronic bank transfer. This is like a credit card where the account is assigned to a bank and you get a card with the credit for the amount of food stamps you would be 'entitled' to. Then, you go shopping at the store and when you go and pay, the clerk swipes the card and the money is deducted from the account. What do you think of this idea? Any pluses to it? Any negatives? Does it make it easier to participate in the food stamp program? Can you see any problems with using this method? What might these be?
- Let's say that if you used food stamps, you would get an additional quantity of some items, do you think that would get people to apply and use them? What items would be enticing? What would be a good amount to add? **PROBE: Double the amount? Other incentives?**

- What about fruits and vegetables- would you purchase more fruits and vegetables if you could get more of them by using food stamps? What makes you say that?
- You know, some people just refuse to apply because they say others give them “dirty looks” or they don’t get “good service” at the grocery stores when they use food stamps. Do you think this is true? What do you think can be done about this?

Messages

- What would you say are the 2 or 3 main things that people would like to know about the food stamp program?
- Let’s say that we want to convince people like yourselves that the food stamp program is worth applying for. What would we have to tell them to convince them to apply.
(Possible messages include: Reduce stigma, Eligibility information, Convince people that food stamps can improve nutrition, especially for children, and help improve health, performance at school, Inform people that food stamp office or program has improved, become more user friendly)
- What about saying something like, “The food stamp program is a good way to provide for your children”. Do you think that would motivate people to apply? What makes you say that?
- Have you heard or seen anything about the food stamp program? Where? What do you remember hearing or seeing?
- How can we get word out about the program? **PROBE: TV (Which programs?), radio (Stations & times), newspapers, community-based groups, community locations, churches, community agencies, Others. Who would you listen to the most? To whom should the messages be targeted?**
- Is there a person that comes to mind that would be good to use to talk about the program? Tell me about that person.

GIVE THEM THE TASK OF COMING UP WITH A SLOGAN FOR GETTING PEOPLE TO APPLY AND STEP OUT TO CONSULT WITH THE CLIENT.

- Before we talk about what you came up with, let me ask this: Would it be a good idea to change the name of the program from Food Stamps to something else? What makes you say that? What could it be called?

Closing

- What are some food items that you always buy or get?
- Let’s say that you just got an additional \$20.00 a month to spend on food. What would you use it for? What items would you buy with that extra money?

Moderator's Guide
Food Stamp Usage – Draft 5 – post San Diego
August 17, 2001

I. Introductions and Ground-rules

(5-10 Minutes)

1. Moderator introduces her/himself and explains project's purpose.

Hello, my name is _____ and I work for a research company in Los Angeles. We are very interested in the use of food stamps and what keeps some people from using them. We are also interested in hearing your thoughts and opinions about what we can tell the people who run the food stamp program to make it easier for people to use food stamps.

Before we start talking, let me tell you a little about this focus group and answer any initial questions you may have.

2. Explain focus group process.

A focus group is a research method for collecting data similar to surveys, except that rather than asking questions on a one-on-one basis, the whole group is asked and everyone can respond.

3. Explain ground-rules.

- We will be tape-recording your comments today. This is for me to review and summarize your thoughts in a report. It would be too hard to try to talk and take notes, so I use a tape recorder. Also, I want to let you know that there are colleagues of mine on the other side of the mirror listening to your commentary.
- As explained in the consent form, this focus group is confidential. Everything you say in this discussion will be kept private. No names will be used in my report. It is important to us that you give us your honest opinions.
- To make sure we end the group on time and cover everything we need to, I will be controlling how much time we spend talking about some of the issues this evening. I will move the discussion from topic to topic, and allow everyone an opportunity to speak.
- You do not need to raise your hands, but please speak loudly, clearly, and one at a time without interrupting others. If you speak at the same time I won't be able to understand what you said when I listen to the tapes later. Also, the tapes can't see you nodding or shaking your head. So, please speak up and share your opinions
- There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your opinions and you do not have to agree with one another. We are actually interested in hearing different opinions.

4. Respondent introductions:

Please tell me your first name, and something about yourself-if you're married & have kids, their ages, what part of town you live in; how long you've lived there; and what type of work you do. And, Yes, homemakers do work hard at home.

Food Consumption & Purchasing Patterns

- Let's talk a little bit first about some of your favorite food. What do you like to buy at the grocery store? What are some of your favorite foods to buy?
- Where do you usually shop for food? What are some of the stores you go to? Why go there?
- Who usually shops for groceries?

Tight Times Situation

- Are there ever times during the month or the year when money is tight? What do you do about food during those times?
- Let me give you a situation. This is **Diane's/Jimmy's** situation. (Diane/Jimmy) was working as a (childcare worker/delivery man) [Choose appropriate job.] but got laid off about 3 months ago. S/He's gone through the little money that s/he'd put away for rough times. S/He's barely made the rent/house payment this month. S/He's already missed one payment on the car. S/He's in a bind, now. The kids are starting school. The family is running low on food.
 - How do you think ____ feels? What is one word you would describe how s/he feels?
 - Should ____ ask for help? When should s/he ask for help?
 - Where should s/he go first for help? Why there? Where should s/he go next? Why there? How about after that?
 - Do you think that ____ will ever ask for help? What makes you say that?
 - What might be some reasons why ____ would not go to the governmental programs to get help? What might s/he be afraid of?
 - What would you do in this situation?

New Design for Food Program

- Let's say that there is a new program in the community that will help out people like ____ by providing food. Help me design this new program.
 - Who should be able to get help?
 - Where should they be able to get help?
 - How do we know that they really need the helping hand?
 - For how long should they be able to get help?
 - How soon should they get the help?
 - Where should they be able to get the food?
 - What about applying for the program? What should that look like?
 - What about the actual services? Who should be there working in the program? What hours? Where should the program be located?
 - How could we tell people about this new program?
 - What type of organization would sponsor this program- Government? Church? Community group?

Knowledge About the Food Stamp Program

- I'm going to switch topics on you. Let me ask about the Food Stamp Program. You have a pad in front of you. Before you say anything, write down the first thing that comes to mind when I say "Food Stamp Program". Now, write down the first thing that comes to mind when I say "Food Stamps". **After giving them a minute, discuss what they wrote.**
- How many of you know about the food stamp program?
- How does it work? What do you have to do to get food stamps?
- Are there rules for being able to get food stamps? What do you think these are?
 - Are these rules different from other assistance programs and can you qualify for one and not the other?
 - Can you receive food stamps if you work? Own a house? Own a car?
 - What about citizenship? Are the rules the same for citizens and legal immigrants? Can you get food stamps if you're a legal immigrant? Can your kids be eligible, even if you're not?
- How/Where did you find out about these rules?
- **[FOR NEVER USERS or DROP OUTS ONLY:]** Have any of you ever applied for food stamps? What happened? PROBE: How long did it take you to get approved? How did you feel about that? What could be done to change that?

Family Rules Regarding Health & Nutrition

- Who in the family is responsible for making decisions about health issues? Let's say that you need to see a doctor. Who makes the decision for you to go? Who decides where you go?
- What about decisions regarding food and where to shop and what to buy? Who decides that?
- What about applying for a program? Let's say that there is a new program in the community that would give your kids a free lunch. Who decides whether you apply for the program or not?
- Who would go out and get that information to begin with? How would you know about it?
- Now, let's say the family does not have enough money to buy food. Who decides that the family will apply for food stamps? Who goes out and gets information about the program? Who would you go to first to find out about the food stamp program? Who in the family would go out and actually do all the work of getting the paperwork and filling it out?
- If you are not the decision-maker: Do you agree with the decision-maker in your household? What can you do to influence that decision?
- Tell me this, what has to happen before you even consider applying for food stamps? What would you do or where would you go before you say, "O.K., I'll go get into the food stamp program"?

Barriers to Usage of Food Stamp Program

- Does anyone here think that they might qualify for the program? (**PROBE: In case you don't receive a good response from this question, ask the following: "Do you know someone who may qualify but is not already receiving food stamps?"**)
- What keeps you, your family, or your friends from applying for the program? **PROBE: Fingerprinting needed for application; Too much value in assets (i.e., own a car); Services provided by Food Stamp program staff; Loss of Immigrant status; Experiences of others; Negative stigma associated with food stamp use; Don't know they are eligible; Don't believe they need food stamps; Benefit too small; Application is too complicated; Time and cost of applying is too high (due to transportation, work lost, childcare, etc.) ; Discouragement from others. Which of these barriers play the largest roles? Can you rank these in order of importance?**
- Does anyone use any other programs to help themselves and their families - like WIC, a food bank, or some church-based or other community-based program? How do you think this might be different from using food stamps? How might it be similar? **PROBE: Access, staff qualities, treatment from program staff, hours of operation, convenience, others' attitudes toward the recipient, Other?**
- What about getting help from your family? Is this similar or different from using food stamps?
- What kind of people use food stamps?
- Is getting food stamps the "Last Resort"? If so, why?

Facilitates Food Stamp Use

- What would have to happen in the program before you would consider applying for food stamps? Does anything need to change?
- Is there anything about the application process that needs to change? How much help do you need for going through the application process?
- Is there anything about where you apply that needs to change?
- Is there anything about the staffing of the program that needs to change?
- Is there anything about the location of the offices?
- What about the hours of operation?
- Let's say the program started an electronic bank transfer. This is like a credit card where the account is assigned to a bank and you get a card with the credit for the amount of food stamps you would be 'entitled' to. Then, you go shopping at the store and when you go and pay, the clerk swipes the card and the money is deducted from the account. What do you think of this idea? Any pluses to it? Any negatives? Does it make it easier to participate in the food stamp program? Can you see any problems with using this method? What might these be?

- Let's say that if you used food stamps, you would get an additional quantity of some items. For example, if you bought one loaf of whole wheat bread, you could get a second loaf free. Do you think that would get people to apply and use Food Stamps? What items would people want to get? What would be a good amount to get for free? **PROBE: Double the amount? Other incentives?**
- What about fruits and vegetables- if the program worked so that you got fruits and vegetables at half price, would you want to use the program? Would you buy more fruits and vegetables than you buy now if you were using food stamps that gave you a discount? What makes you say that?
- Let's say that the Food Stamp application is 6 pages long and you have to complete it to be eligible. What amount of money each month would be worth filling out a 6-page application? **Probe: \$30/person, \$50/person, \$75/person, \$100/person**
- What do you think about people being able to use Food Stamps in restaurants? What makes you say that? **If yes, Probe: Types of restaurants**
- Right now, people can buy any kind of food with Food Stamps. What do you think about the idea of excluding certain foods like soft drinks and chips?
- You know, some people just refuse to apply because they say others give them "dirty looks" or they don't get "good service" at the grocery stores when they use food stamps. Do you think this is true? What do you think can be done about this?

Messages

- What would you say are the 2 or 3 main things that people would like to know about the food stamp program?
- Let's say that we want to convince people like yourselves that the food stamp program is worth applying for. What would we have to tell you to convince you to apply. **(Possible messages include: Reduce stigma; Eligibility information; Convince people that food stamps can improve nutrition, especially for children, their health and performance at school; Inform people that food stamp office or program has improved and become more user friendly)**
- What about saying something like, "The food stamp program is a good way to provide for your children". Do you think that would motivate people to apply? What makes you say that?
- What about saying something like: "The food stamps program can help you afford more healthy foods and reduce problems like diabetes, heart disease and overweight? ". Do you think that would motivate people to apply? What makes you say that?
- Have you heard or seen any ads about the food stamp program? Where? What do you remember hearing or seeing?
- How can we get word out about the program? **PROBE: TV (Which programs?), radio (Stations & times), newspapers, community-based groups, community locations, churches, community agencies, Others. Who would you listen to the most? To whom should the messages be targeted?**
- Is there a person that comes to mind that would be good to use to talk about the program? Tell me about that person.

X. Creative Materials

1. Here is some information about food stamps I am going to show you. Without talking, please write down what you think is the main message; if there is more than one, write them all down. Let's start by telling me what you wrote down as the main message. **Ask each participant.**

- Let's think about some of the reasons we have said that people do not apply for food stamps. Does this booklet talk about some of those reasons? How does this booklet make you feel about some of those reasons?
- Does this booklet contain all the information you think is important for someone to have who might qualify for food stamps? What makes you say that?
- Do you think this booklet would get someone to apply to the food stamp program? Why do you feel this way?
- Tell me about the type of person this booklet was made for.
- Where would be some good places to distribute this booklet.

2. Now I am going to show you a flyer. **Give English-speaking women A Small Reason to Find Out If You Qualify for Food Stamps; give Spanish-speaking men the flyer you think is most appropriate.**

- Does this flyer contain all the information you think is important for someone to have who might qualify for food stamps? What makes you say that?
- Do you think this flyer would get someone to apply to the food stamp program? Why do you feel this way?
- Tell me about the type of person this flyer was made for.
- Where would be some good places to post this flyer?

3. Here are 3 slogans that have been used on these types of flyers. **Read and write on the flip chart: Guess Who Qualifies for Food Stamps – You Might; A Small Reason to Find Out if You Qualify for Food Stamps – Your Child; and Hunger Does Not Discriminate.**

- Which slogan do you like best? Least? What makes you say that?
- Which of these slogans would be most likely to get you and people you know to stop and read the information on the flyer? Why do you think so?

GIVE THEM THE TASK OF COMING UP WITH A SLOGAN FOR GETTING PEOPLE TO APPLY AND STEP OUT TO CONSULT WITH THE CLIENT.

- Before we talk about what you came up with, let me ask this: Would it be a good idea to change the name of the program from Food Stamps to something else? What makes you say that? What could it be called?

Closing

- What are some food items that you always buy or get?
- Let's say that you just got an additional \$20.00 a month to spend on food. What would you use it for? What items would you buy with that extra money?

Appendix B:
Screener

Barriers to Food Stamp Usage
Nutrition Network
 Screener – Draft 3

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

 ZIP CODE _____

TEL. _____ / _____ HOME _____ / _____ WORK _____

Good afternoon/evening. Are you the head of your household? Thank you. My name is _____ and I thought you might be interested in participating in a study about the use of food stamps. I am not selling anything nor do I want to sell you anything. I am interested only on your opinions about the food stamp program, and you don't have to be using food stamps to qualify for the study. May I ask you a few questions to see if you qualify? If you do qualify, I would like to invite you to a discussion with other people like yourself about food stamps. May I continue?

1. Are you presently employed? YES _____ NO _____
2. Which of the following age groups best describes your age?
 Under 18 years? 1 **(TERMINATE)** 35 to 39 years? 5
 18 to 24 years ? 2 40 to 45 years? 6
 25 to 29 years ? 3 Over 45 years? 7 **(TERMINATE)**
 30 to 34 years? 4
3. Do you have children living with you at home?
 YES _____ NO _____ **(TERMINATE)**
4. Including yourself, how many persons are there living in your household are:
 Under 5 years old? _____ Over 17 years old? _____
 5 to 17 years old? _____ Total in household? _____
5. Do you receive WIC benefits? YES _____ NO _____
6. Do your children receive/qualify for free or reduced-price breakfast or lunch programs?
 YES _____ NO _____
8. How many hours a week do you watch television? _____
9. How many hours a week do you listen to the radio? _____
10. May I ask what is your race or ethnicity:
 White/Anglo 1
 Black/African American 2
 Hispanic/Latina 3
 Other? 4 **(TERMINATE)**

11. May I ask what is your marital status:
- | | |
|--|---|
| Single? | 1 |
| Separated? | 2 |
| Divorced? | 3 |
| Married? or | 4 |
| Living with a partner (in a marriage-like relationship)? | 5 |
12. Which of the following groups describes your household's total income per year:
- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| Less than \$10,000? | 1 |
| \$10,000 to \$15,000? | 2 |
| \$15,000 to \$20,000? | 3 |
| More than \$20,000? | 4 (TERMINATE) |
13. Are you presently using Food Stamps?
YES_____ (TERMINATE) NO_____
14. **IF NO:** Have you used Food Stamps in the past?
YES_____ (**RECRUIT FOR FOOD STAMP DROPOUT GROUP**)
NO_____
15. What was the last year of school you attended or completed:
- | | | | |
|-----------------|---|-------------------|---------|
| Grammar school? | 1 | College graduate? | 4 |
| High school? | 2 | Technical School? | 5 |
| Some college? | 3 | Other | 6 _____ |

We are inviting people like yourself to participate in a research group discussion on _____ at _____. The session will last approximately one and half hours. Can we count on you to be there?

Group 1: ____

Group 2: ____

Group 3: ____

Appendix C:
Print Materials Tested in the Groups

A SMALL REASON TO FIND OUT IF YOU QUALIFY FOR FOOD STAMPS.

YOUR CHILD.

FOOD STAMPS HELP

SINGLE PEOPLE AND

FAMILIES WITH LITTLE

OR NO INCOME

TO BUY FOOD.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I CAN GET HELP?

You can get help if:

- You have low income or work for low wages.
- You have or will get a social security number.
- You have child or elder care costs, or pay child support.
- You have high rent, a house payment, or utility bills.
- You have a car that is not worth too much.

HOW DO I GET FOOD STAMPS?

- Look in the government section (blue pages) of your phone book. You can find food stamps under “social services department” or “welfare department.”

• Call the food stamp office to set up a meeting with a worker. **Ask what papers you need to bring.** The worker will need to see your pay stubs, rent information, and utility bills. If you pay child support, you'll also need your child support papers.

• At the food stamp office, you will talk with a worker, answer some questions, and sign some papers.

• If you can't go to the food stamp office, you may send a friend or relative to talk to the worker. Or, you may be able to talk with a worker on the phone.

CAN LEGAL NONCITIZENS GET FOOD STAMPS?

Talk to a food stamp worker about this. Even if you can't get food stamps, family members born in this country may be able to get them. Getting food stamps won't hurt you if you want to become a citizen.

CAN I GET HELP IF I AM NOT WORKING?

Yes. If you are able to work, you must look for work, take a job offer, or go to training.

WHAT IF I AM ELDERLY OR HAVE A DISABILITY?

If you are 60 years old or over, or have a disability, you don't have to look for work. You can also claim high medical bills that insurance doesn't cover.

ARE FOOD STAMPS CASH?

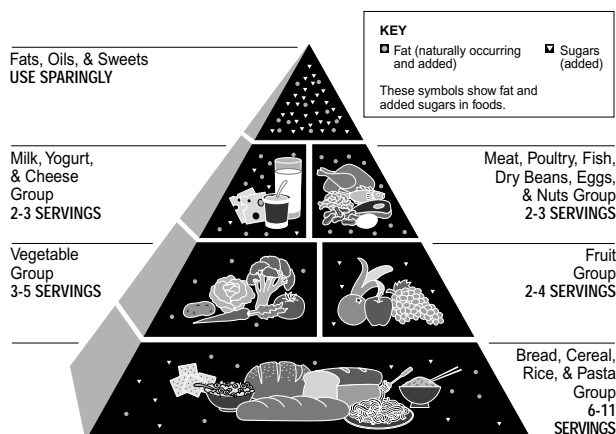
No. Food stamps are paper coupons that don't look like regular paper money. You can use them only for food. In some areas, food stamps come on a plastic card that you use just like a bank card.

GOOD FOOD CHOICES PROMOTE A HEALTHY FUTURE AT EVERY STAGE OF LIFE

- Food stamps expand your ability to eat a variety of foods.

- The Food Guide Pyramid shows you how to choose foods to eat a healthy diet.

FOOD GUIDE PYRAMID A GUIDE TO DAILY FOOD CHOICES*



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
*The Food Guide Pyramid is a guideline for normal adults.

- Be physically active! Walk, jog, dance, or play with your kids at least 30 minutes a day.
- Watch your weight! Choose lower fat foods like fruit, vegetables, and skim milk.
- Drink plenty of water!

For more information, call:

Or call toll-free 1-800-221-5689



United States Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

UNA PEQUEÑA RAZÓN PARA AVERIGUAR SI PUEDE OBTENER CUPONES DE ALIMENTOS:

SU HIJO.

LOS CUPONES DE
ALIMENTOS AYUDAN
A INDIVIDUOS Y
FAMILIAS CON POCOS
O NINGÚN RECURSO
A COMPRAR ALIMENTOS.

¿CÓMO PUEDO SABER SI PUEDO OBTENER AYUDA?

Usted puede obtener ayuda si:

- Tiene bajos ingresos o trabaja por baja paga.
- Tiene o va a obtener un número de seguro social.
- Tiene que hacerse cargo de un menor o una persona mayor, o tiene que pagar por la manutención de un menor.
- Tiene altos gastos de renta, pagos de hipoteca o recibos de agua, teléfono o electricidad.
- Tiene un auto cuyo valor no es muy alto.

¿CÓMO PUEDO OBTENER CUPONES DE ALIMENTOS?

- Busque en el "government section" o páginas azules de su guía telefónica, bajo la sección de "social services department" o "welfare department".
- Llame a la oficina de cupones de alimentos para hacer una cita con un empleado. **Pregúntele qué documentos tiene que presentar.** El empleado necesitará ver los recibos de su salario, renta, agua, teléfono, electricidad, y las órdenes de pago de manutención de un menor.
- En la oficina de cupones de alimentos podrá responder a algunas preguntas y firmar algunos documentos.
- Si no puede ir a la oficina de cupones de alimentos, puede mandar a un amigo o a un familiar a hablar con el empleado. O también puede llamar por teléfono a la oficina.

¿PUEDEN LOS INMIGRANTES LEGALES OBTENER CUPONES DE ALIMENTOS?

Hable con un empleado de la oficina de cupones de alimentos acerca del tema. Si usted no puede obtener cupones de alimentos, miembros de su familia que sean ciudadanos de los Estados Unidos podrían. Obtener cupones de alimentos no afecta los trámites para obtener su ciudadanía.

¿PUEDO OBTENER AYUDA SI NO ESTOY TRABAJANDO?

Sí. Si es capaz de trabajar, debe buscar empleo, aceptar una oferta de trabajo o capacitarse.

¿Y SI SOY MAYOR DE EDAD O TENGO ALGUNA LIMITACIÓN FÍSICA?

Si tiene más de 60 años de edad o tiene alguna limitación física, no tiene que buscar trabajo. También puede reportar altos pagos de medicinas o servicios médicos que su seguro no cubra.

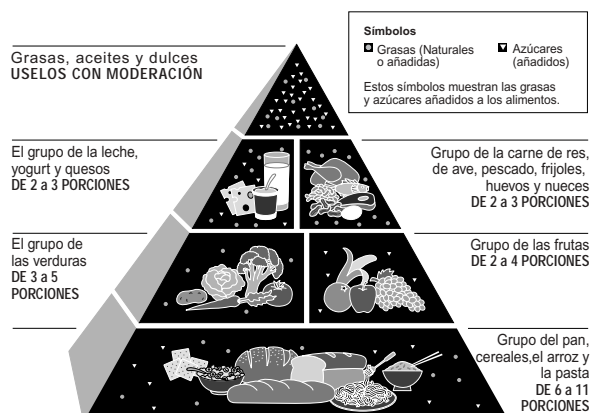
¿SON LOS CUPONES DE ALIMENTOS COMO DINERO EN EFECTIVO?

No. Los cupones de alimentos no se parecen a los billetes. Sólo puede usarlos para comprar comida. En algunas áreas, los cupones de alimentos vienen en forma de una tarjeta plástica que puede usarse como una tarjeta bancaria.

UNA DIETA SALUDABLE LO AYUDA A TENER UN FUTURO SANO, NO IMPORTA SU EDAD

- Los cupones de alimentos mejoran sus posibilidades de consumir una gran variedad de alimentos.
- La Pirámide Alimenticia le enseña como escoger alimentos para tener una dieta saludable.

LA PIRÁMIDE ALIMENTICIA: LA GUÍA DIARIA DE SELECCIÓN DE ALIMENTOS*



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

*La Pirámide Alimenticia es una guía para el adulto promedio.

- Muévase! Camine, corra o juega con sus niños por lo menos media hora al día.
- Vigile su peso. Escoja alimentos bajos en grasa como frutas frescas, verduras y leche desnatada.
- Tome mucha agua.

Para mayor información, llame al:

O llame al número gratuito 1-800-221-5689



United States Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service

USDA es un proveedor de oportunidades y empleo igualitario.

GUESS WHO QUALIFIES FOR FOOD STAMPS?

YOU MIGHT.

FOOD STAMPS HELP

SINGLE PEOPLE AND

FAMILIES WITH LITTLE

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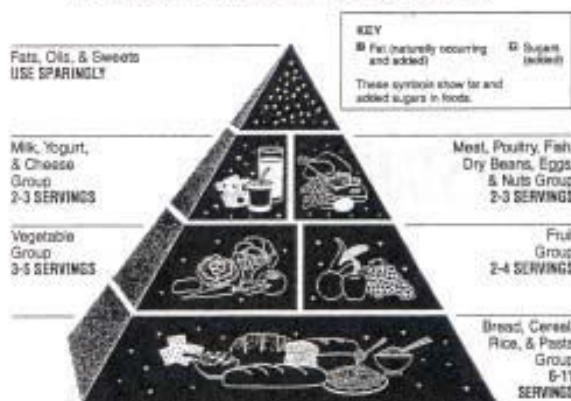
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- Watch your weight! Choose lower fat foods like fruit, vegetables, and skim milk.
- Drink plenty of water!

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¿ADIVINA QUIÉN PODRÍA OBTENER CUPONES DE ALIMENTOS?

TÚ.

**LOS CUPONES DE
ALIMENTOS AYUDAN A
INDIVIDUOS Y FAMILIAS
CON POCOS O NINGÚN
RECURSO A COMPRAR
ALIMENTOS.**

¿CÓMO PUEDO SABER SI PUEDO OBTENER AYUDA?

USTED PUEDES OBTENER AYUDA SI:

- Tienes bajos ingresos o trabajas por baja paga.
- Tienes o vas a obtener un número de seguro social.
- Tienes que hacerte cargo de un menor o una persona mayor, o tienes que pagar por la manutención de un menor.
- Tienes altos gastos de renta, pagos de hipoteca o recibos de agua, teléfono o electricidad.
- Tienes un auto cuyo valor no es muy alto.

¿CÓMO PUEDO OBTENER CUPONES DE ALIMENTOS?

- Busque en el "government section" o páginas azules de su guía telefónica, bajo la sección de "social services department" o "welfare department".
- Llame a la oficina de cupones de alimentos para hacer una cita con un empleado. **Pregúntele qué documentos tiene que presentar.** El empleado necesitará ver los recibos de su salario, renta, agua, teléfono, electricidad, y las órdenes de pago de manutención de un menor.
- En la oficina de cupones de alimentos podrá responder a algunas preguntas y firmar algunos documentos.
- Si no puede ir a la oficina de cupones de alimentos, puede mandar a un amigo o a un familiar a hablar con el empleado. O también puede llamar por teléfono a la oficina.

¿PUEDEN LOS INMIGRANTES LEGALES OBTENER CUPONES DE ALIMENTOS?

Hable con un empleado de la oficina de cupones de alimentos acerca del tema. Si usted no puede obtener cupones de alimentos, miembros de su familia que sean ciudadanos de los Estados Unidos podrían. Obtener cupones de alimentos no afecta los trámites para obtener su ciudadanía.

¿PUEDO OBTENER AYUDA SI NO ESTOY TRABAJANDO?

Sí. Si es capaz de trabajar, debe buscar empleo, aceptar una oferta de trabajo o capacitarse.

¿Y SI SOY MAYOR DE EDAD O TENGO ALGUNA LIMITACIÓN FÍSICA?

Si tiene más de 60 años de edad o tiene alguna limitación física, no tiene que buscar trabajo. También puede reportar altos pagos de medicinas o servicios médicos que su seguro no cubra.

¿SON LOS CUPONES DE ALIMENTOS COMO DINERO EN EFECTIVO?

No. Los cupones de alimentos no se parecen a los billetes. Sólo puede usarlos para comprar comida. En algunas áreas, los cupones de alimentos vienen en forma de una tarjeta plástica que puede usarse como una tarjeta bancaria.

UNA DIETA SALUDABLE LO AYUDA A TENER UN FUTURO SANO, NO IMPORTA SU EDAD

- Los cupones de alimentos mejoran sus posibilidades de consumir una gran variedad de alimentos.
- La Pirámide Alimenticia le enseña como escoger alimentos para tener una dieta saludable.

LA PIRÁMIDE ALIMENTICIA: LA GUÍA DIARIA DE SELECCIÓN DE ALIMENTOS*



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

*La Pirámide Alimenticia es una guía para el adulto promedio.

- Muévase! Camine, corra o juega con sus niños por lo menos media hora al día.
- Vigile su peso. Escoja alimentos bajos en grasa como frutas frescas, verduras y leche desnatada.
- Tome mucha agua.

Para mayor información, llame al:

O llame al número gratuito 1-800-221-5689



United States Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service

USDA es un proveedor de oportunidades y empleo igualitario.

If my household is eligible, how much will we get?

For October 1, 2000, through September 30, 2001, the table below shows the most you could get if you have no income. As your income goes up, the amount of food stamps you will get goes down.

People in Household	Maximum Monthly Allotment*
1	\$ 130
2	238
3	341
4	434
5	515
6	618
7	683

**Amounts are higher in Alaska and Hawaii.*

Are food stamps cash?

No. Food stamps are paper coupons that you can use only for food. In some areas, food stamp benefits come on a plastic card that you use just like a bank card. Most food stores take food stamps.

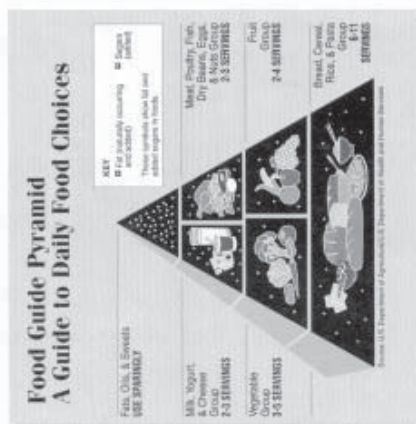
What if I have more questions?

You should call your local food stamp office. Our toll-free number, 1-800-221-5689, can direct you to your State's toll-free number.

For more information about Food and Nutrition Service programs, please visit our web site at www.fns.usda.gov

Choose foods to promote a healthy future at every stage of life.

- Food stamps expand your ability to eat a variety of foods.
- Let the Pyramid guide your food choices.



- Aim for a healthy weight.
- Be physically active each day – at least 30 minutes for adults and 60 minutes for children.
- Choose a variety of grains (especially whole grains), fruits, and vegetables daily.

USDA United States Department of Agriculture
 Food and Nutrition Service
 FNS-313
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What is the Food Stamp Program?

Food stamps help single people and families with little or no income to buy food.

How do I get food stamps?

Look in the government section (blue pages) of your phone book. You can find food stamps under "social services department" or "welfare department."

Call the food stamp office to set up a meeting with a worker. Ask what papers you need to bring. The worker will need to see your pay stubs, rent or mortgage payments, utility bills, child- or elder-care bills, and child-support orders (the court order and canceled checks).

At the food stamp office you will talk with a worker, answer some questions, and sign some papers. If you can't go to the food stamp office, you may send a relative or a friend to talk with the worker. Or you may be able to talk with a worker on the phone.

Can I get food stamps just for myself if I live with my family or with others?

People who live together and buy food and prepare meals together are grouped as a "household." Husbands and wives and most children under age 22 must be one household.

Will I have to get a social security number?

Yes, you must have or will have to get a social security number for each household member.

Can legal noncitizens get food stamps?

You might be able to get food stamps. Talk with a food stamp worker about this. Even if you can't get food stamps, family members born in this country can. Getting food stamps won't hurt you if you want to become a citizen.

Can I get help if I'm not working?

If you're able to work, you must look for work, take a job offer, or go to training.

How many assets can we have?

Households with a member age 60 or older may have up to \$3,000 in countable assets. Other households may have up to \$2,000.

We don't count the assets of people who are receiving State cash assistance (TANF) or Federal supplemental security income (SSI). We don't count your home and up to \$4,650 of the fair market value of one car. We don't count a vehicle that you need to carry a physically disabled household member.

How much income can we have?

We count most types of income. Gross income means income before any deductions. Net income means gross income minus allowable deductions.

TANF households are already eligible. Households without an elderly or disabled member must meet both a gross and net income test. Households with an elderly or disabled member only have to meet a net income test.

For October 1, 2000, through September 30, 2001, the income limits follow:

People in Household	Gross Income*	Net Income*
1	\$ 905	\$ 696
2	1,219	938
3	1,533	1,180
4	1,848	1,421
5	2,162	1,663
6	2,476	1,905
7	2,790	2,146

What are the allowable deductions?

- 20 percent of earned income;
- a standard deduction of \$134*;
- medical expenses over \$35 a month for elderly or disabled members;
- certain dependent-care costs when needed for training, education, or work, but not more than \$200 for each child under age 2 and not more than \$175 for each other dependent;
- legally owed child support; and
- a percentage of shelter costs.

*Amounts are higher in Alaska and Hawaii.

